

THE REVIEWER REVIEWED:

or,

SCRUTATOR'S (MR. PETER LE SUEUR'S) INCOMPETENCE, TO PERFORM THE SELF-IMPOSED DUTIES OF A CRITIC, EXPOSED.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—You asked me if I had seen the letter addressed to me by Mr. Peter Le Sueur, under the signature of "Scrutator," animadverting upon the style and matter of my recently published pamphlet. I answer, yes, I have both seen it and read it, he having sent me a copy of it for that purpose. And now that I have answered your question, I will proceed to describe the gentleman and his production according to their merits.

The letter is quite characteristic of the critic, I assure you, as many will testify. You see him here, as he has been often seen by others, under the influence of a tumult of vindictive feelings, which, overpowering all sobriety of judgment, have plunged him into a position, as little to his honor as to his comfort. He would fain shine in the world as a literary celebrity, (he prefers being known as a critic, for which, were a waspish spirit a leading qualification, he would be eminently fitted,) and has done considerable with his pen to that end. But he frequently mistakes *pertness* for *profoundness*; and while skimming the surface and grasping a *bubble*, he would have you to believe he had gone down to the bottom and fished up a pearl. He takes up with marked eagerness anything that falls from my pen with the evident design, of showing how *incompetent* I am to write, and how *competent* he is to criticise. Thus he gratifies a latent grudge long cherished towards me, and at the same time discharges a quantity of bile, which, at times, his system secretes with singular activity. Deeply concerned (professedly,) that "the Wesleyan Ministers" should not be degraded, he feels bound "to enter his protest against the literary labors of the Rev. Mr. Borland." Yet, while making this profession, he has no scruple at *degrading* and *libelling* them himself, which he does by holding them up (for the mere support of a rotten argument) as systematic violators of their most solemn pledges to maintain the discipline of our church intact. Hear him! "You know that thousands of nominal members are kept on the books who are seldom, if ever found in attendance upon class, and more, you know that there is very little disposition on the part of the ministers generally to expel such delinquents, but that any trifling excuse is taken in explanation, if explanation is demanded."

Vain man! does he think the ministers of our church will accept him as their champion? Will they fail to discern that while he smooths them with one hand, he stabs them with the other? Truly, "*the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*"

His very critical examination of my pamphlet has convinced him that many of my sentences are not constructed to *his taste*; and that some of my words (whether from carelessness or ignorance he is not altogether certain,) are unsuited to the place and office I designed them to fill. To speak and write ones own language with clearness and accuracy are attainments at which all ought to aim, and for which no pains should be spared; yet when I know that the eccentric Cobbett has detected as *many* and as *great* grammatical ineligancies and inaccuracies in the writings of Addison, Blair, Johnson, Watts, Lindley Murray; &c. &c., as "Scrutator" has in my pamphlet, I am spared the confusion and shame which otherwise, possibly, he might have brought upon me. Cobbett, differing from "Scrutator," however, did not *coin* mistakes for the sake of effect; he was satisfied with what the writings of those celebrities alone supplied. He would not have written "*references*," when the original was "*reference*." Nor for himself would he have written "*the same awkwardness again*" when he meant *awkwardness*. I have little to say in reference to the *real* grammatical inaccuracies, or ineligancies, which "Scrutator" has dished up with so much malignant satisfaction. If such men as Addison, Blair, Johnson, Lindley Murray, and various others whom Cobbett cites, could not preserve their writings from such defects, although written and revised with the greatest care; a Methodist minister, and especially the superintendent of a large Circuit, whose numerous and pressing duties sometimes prevent the doing more than the most hurried revision of what had even been written in haste, can well claim the most lenient consideration from those who are *really* qualified to judge of literary efforts.

What the modest gentleman has written about my "*egotism*" is just as consistent in him, as for a thief to lecture on knavery. There are scores who, should they read this portion of his letter would cry:—*humph! Physician, heal thyself!*

Several of Scrutator's criticisms betray not only remarkable obtuseness of mind, but also great ignorance of the subjects on which he presumes to animadvert. These facts placed by the side of his impudent dictations show him to be a character of no ordinary grade. In proof of what I now say, attend to the following:—"At page 7" he fancies he finds a "mess of contradictions and grammatical blunders from which all my skill cannot extricate" me. This he proves thus: "That Mr. Wesley did not design that his societies should ever assume a separate church organization is admitted; but that that separate organization was forced upon his society (societies) by circumstances which he could not control, is well known, as it was clearly apprehended, and to some extent provided for, by Mr. Wesley himself," (pamphlet;) now Scrutator's critique; "Now if you had purposely tried to make an absurd sentence I doubt whether you could have succeeded so well," (as when? where? or how? Here is grammatical accuracy and gentlemanly bearing a la "Scrutator.") Again, he says:—"First we are told Mr. Wesley did not design his societies should ever assume a separate church organization;" but that it, "the organization" was forced upon his society (societies) by circumstance he could not control. Was he there to exercise the control? No, he was in heaven, &c. &c. Thus the critic; now for the facts; after which, or I am mistaken, you will see more clearly than the sharp-sighted "Scrutator" where the blunders lie.

You well know, my friend, that Mr. Wesley never designed his societies should become an organized church, but ever remain an integral portion of the Episcopal Church of England. You know also, that he labored amidst many discouragements, to prevent the one and to perpetuate the other. Further, that circumstances which he could not control, arose in the conduct of ungodly and persecuting ministers of that church towards the members of his societies, and which, he apprehended, would lead to the very separation he was so anxious to prevent. Forseeing, especially towards the close of his life, that little probability remained of his Societies being recognized and treated as a portion of the Church of England; or, that were they even so treated, they would have the spiritual culture bestowed upon them which they needed; and therefore, that that which he had labored against, viz: a separate church organization, would be necessitated—he “to some extent provided for it,” by enrolling a deed in Chancery; one important end of which being, to give the conference of his preachers such a legal Status, that when the thing feared became a necessity, they might be in circumstances to meet it. All Methodistically well read persons are sufficiently acquainted with these facts. Why then is not “Scrutator?” Because—you can add the rest.

The learned critic yet lingers about “page 7,” and the supposed “inaccuracies in the same paragraph.” Herein he resembles the obtrusive insect which, with buzzing Impertinence labors to find an unsound spot from whence to suck its delicious and desired aliment. “You go on thus” he observes, and then quotes from the pamphlet as follows:—“Yet we find no evidence, not the slightest, that he wished the condition of membership to be made less stringent, but the contrary rather. The burden of proving the latter rests with you my friend.” Then, his comment; “Now I put it to you whether the latter here spoken of may not honestly be taken to mean the supposed wish of Mr. Wesley, to render the condition of membership more stringent?” Most assuredly, it is the very meaning I intended to convey. But what then? Why, says this leaped and modest writer; “by which you mean that Mr. Wesley was disposed to make the condition of membership more stringent than it already was, an assertion, which, let me tell you in all sincerity, (doubtless) is sheer nonsense.” Mighty polite, Mr. Scrutator, as a paddy would say. But then he proves it thus:—“the condition was regular attendance at class-meeting, a condition admitting of no gradation of rigor. Such attendance allows of no degrees of comparison, and there can be nothing added by way of superlative.”

It does not appear to have entered the cranium of this denouncer of “sheer nonsense,” that if Mr. Wesley had added to attendance at class-meetings as a condition of membership, a demand to abstain from conformity to the world in a stricter sense than some of his societies were inclined to do, that such an addition would have made the condition of membership “more stringent”: and yet a “Methodistically well read” person has not failed to perceive, in Mr. W.’s sermons and letters, that this was much more probable than any attempt to relax the rule. Allow such to have been the case, and would there not have been visible, a “gradation in rigor?”

Another specimen of logical acuteness and of superlative impudence we have in the following: “On the same page (not the same page, observant sir;—that was p. 8, this is p. 9,) you go on, ‘The Apostle may be supposed to point to assemblies of the primitive church, exactly similar to our class-meetings.’ Now my dear sir, do you not see that you assume as a fact that such meetings had been previously established, and were held, and that the shadow of doubt which the sentence carries, does not rest upon the existence of such institutions, but on the directness of the Apostolic allusion? Did you mean to affirm that meetings exactly similar to Methodist class-meetings were then held? I think not, (but why do you think so?) and your false composition justifies the inference that you did. The whole of the paragraph animadverted upon, is confused jargon.”

But what in this gentleman’s opinion would it be, if the very thing was meant which he thinks I did not mean? It is apparent from his admission that my words have approached to within a “shadow” of that meaning. So much for the composition. That I was justified in referring to such assemblies of Christians as similar in nature to our class-meetings, you will not doubt when you read the scripture—see Heb. 10; 25 And being satisfied on this point, you will have yet another specimen of the refined sensibilities of our would-be critic.

The defects in style which “Scrutator” finds, and affects to find, in my pamphlet, and the pompous manner in which he holds them up, would naturally lead to the supposition that he had attained to a faultless perfection in writing; and that what he has written might be confidently referred to as specimens of correct, and even elegant composition. But such an expectation would result in disappointment. The letter on which I have been remarking, charged so fully with illogical conclusions and malignant scurrillity, although written with evident care as to the arrangement of its words, has as an instance of ungrammatical diction, this astounding assertion:—“I believe, and I think most persons at all conversant with the history of early Methodism believe with me, that in instituting the class-meeting, Mr. Wesley did the very best thing that could be done.” What! by instituting class-meetings Mr. W. did the best thing that could be done either by God or man? or, the best thing that any man could do? or, the best thing which Mr. Wesley, in all the range of his capabilities, could do?—Surely the learned gentleman “befogs” us here. Doubtless he meant that class-meetings, with the injunction to attend them, was one of the best things which Mr. W. could institute at the time. This is doubtless his meaning; and yet his words are very far from conveying such a meaning. I have little doubt but that other offences against grammar and common sense might be detected in his letter, but as I have not time at present to scan it over for that purpose, I will give you a rich specimen from another source, of what even he can do in the way of writing “jargon” and “nonsense.”

The note with which he accompanied his letter to me is that source, written at a time, be it remembered, when, if ever, he would be studiously correct. It opens with the following:—“I enclose you the proof of a letter to your address ready to issue.” But what does he mean here? we naturally inquire. Is it that he encloses to me the proof that he has addressed a letter to me? or, is it the proof that somebody, whom he does not know, has addressed a letter to me? Or, is the proof to the effect that a letter to my address is being issued? Or, is it that a proof copy of what he is about to issue is enclosed to me? This latter is probably his meaning, and had he written correctly he would have so expressed himself. And who ever read of a letter ready to issue! To issue what, pray? To be issued we have frequently. Again, this model writer “blunders” in the following style: “As I have no disposition to misrepresent you or your writings, I have deemed it proper [the italicising is mine] to give you the opportunity [how condescending and gracious!] of correcting any misstatements I may unwittingly have made.” If this is not a specimen of affectation and nonsense, then such things never have been, or ever will be. Suppose I had forwarded to him some of the errors I have given you in this letter, might he not, in strict accordance with

the wording of his license, reject them, saying, *I gave you permission to correct any misstatements I had unwittingly made, but not those made from design, and as those you present are of this latter class, I will not allow you to have any thing to do with them.* The words immediately following those quoted would lead you to imagine that such, absurd as it exhibits his conduct to be, must have been his meaning. He says: "If you discover any thing of *that* kind in the document," i.e. if you discover any thing like *unwittingly made misstatements*!! He complains that I did not reply to his communication, and do what he requested: but supposing I could condescend to correspond with so scurrilous a writer, was I endowed with a spirit of divination by which to point out the very class of errors he would call my attention to? And yet this is the man who spouts about "ridiculous contradictions," and of "grammatical rules set at defiance." We may well ask. What next?

A word or two on what he has written about class-meetings ere I close. He says, "This institution (class-meeting) was a necessity of the times." But if you would learn from him whether or not attendance thereon, as a condition of membership, the very thing debated, was such necessity, you would be doomed to disappointment. The reasons he assigns for their use, in the first instance, are good enough, but the inference, so far as the point in discussion is concerned, amounts to this:—that all persons below a certain standard of knowledge and Christian morals, should be compelled to attend class-meetings on pain of expulsion from the church; while those above the line might be left to the exercise of their own discretion. How would this plea suit you?

His argument, drawn from our appreciation and treatment of other churches is equally logical and conclusive. We recognise their standing as Christian churches and greet them as such. True: therefore, so "Scrutator" argues, we should not have a condition of membership which they have not. That is, there should be uniformity; and this is to be effected, not by requiring others to come to our standard, but by us going to theirs. Very liberal, truly. If this plan of uniformity is to be carried out, we shall have the Quaker, with perfect consistency, raising his voice, and that in protesting against baptism and the Lord's supper, as constituting a condition of membership in any church, seeing they are not so regarded in his. And if, in his defence, a member of any of these churches having this quakerly obnoxious condition, should challenge a comparison of effects, as by common consent the value of all means are in this manner best tested, then we may expect to have a foppish critic crying out at the top of his voice;—"All such comparisons are 'invidious', and are 'viewed' by us, the intelligent members of the community, 'as mere absurd arrogancy'!"

Logic is a sharp sword; and as this gentleman wields it with more valour than skill, he oft cuts his own hands while those whom he designs to slay remain uninjured. I have said in my pamphlet that class-meetings "are prized by the great bulk of the best and most spiritual of our membership," "from which it follows," writes "Scrutator", "of course these will attend at all events, whether or not there is a rule to compel them." "What then is the object of the rigorous law?" he asks. "Surely it seems to be nothing more nor less than to retain the unspiritual." He thinks "the inference perfectly logical." After giving the extracts from my pamphlet I have just noticed, he then passes to page 14 for another. It is as follows:—"but let us remove the necessity for attending them (class-meetings) as you think we ought, and soon they would become neglected." Then he observes: "So then, after all, the people who gladly attend them, and who prize them so highly, are only waiting the chance of turning their backs upon them!!! Try it again, Reverend Sir, and see if you can write one page without committing half a dozen blunders and involving yourself in several ridiculous contradictions." In this, with his extracts, you have a specimen of his logic, his theology, and his, shall I say? modesty.

Class-meetings are prized by the best and most spiritual of our people. True, and had we a guarantee that even these would be *always* truly pious and spiritual, we might safely leave attendance on class-meeting to their unfettered choice. But as we know that piety depends for its existence on means, and that there are seasons with the best of our membership, when the deepest sense of obligation is necessary to *compel* their use, as at other times the slightest impulse of privilege will *draw* to them, so we cannot, even for their sakes do away with the obligation as it exists. My idea will, perhaps be better apprehended by the following illustration. Prayer is a means of grace; it is also a condition of salvation. The pious highly prize it and are glad to engage in it. There are seasons when, as a means of grace, only, need they to view it in order to attend to it, properly and profitably; but there are others, when the strong sense of its conditional character must bear in order to their use of it. Remove, supposing we could do so, its conditional character, and you so far weaken the obligation to engage in it that I hesitate not to say, it would become neglected by many, very many, who now use it, and by it maintain a piety beyond suspicion. All this may be said of them without imagining they "are only waiting for a chance of turning their backs upon" it. This, you know, is the theologically truthful view of the case: therefore, he who wields logic so as to overturn truth, as our hero has done in the instance now noticed, proves himself to be illogical: and he who spouts bile at another in the fancied success of such operations, shows that he is a long way below that standard of character which a gentleman deems it important to maintain.

Three reasons are given, and they follow here, which he thinks "operate to prevent attendance upon class-meeting." Three reasons! Why you or I could serve up thirty-and-three, yes, and double that number were they called for, which operate to prevent attendance upon class-meeting. But then *these* are choice ones, irrefutable ones, doubtless; selected with great care and therefore put with so much confidence. You may be somewhat impatient to see them, as I know I should be, coming from such a source, and given with so much parade. Well, here is the first:—"I have known, and now know persons, who without objecting to the institution, would almost as soon meet a bear deprived of her cubs, as meet in class. Their nervous organization cannot bear the ordeal, and with the most sincere desire to avail of every helpful means of grace, they cannot profit by this." When you have got over the stunning effect of so thundering a reason, and can again breathe freely, follow me. Think, if yet your understanding has regained its power of action, have you not known, and do you not "now know persons" of this very class, and in reference to whom, you have more than once concluded, that in them the "nervous organization" was a singular phenomenon? Have you not seen them at times, and heard of them more frequently, when there seemed to be not the slightest impediment from their "nervous organization" to talking and that with powerful effect? And, with what you now know of the freaks of nervous organizations, would you not say, what a pity it is that its operations are so eccentric? I promise you, yes, I would put myself under bonds to any amount, that I will cure ninety-nine out of every hundred such, if they will faithfully follow my prescription. And, as I am unwilling that so efficacious a remedy for so remarkable a disease should be a secret, I will give it

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you to make what use of it you please. It is:—*a diligent use of the means of grace, until the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.* I have never known it to fail.

The second reason is drawn from the inconsistencies, real or supposed, of the "*Mr. Twist*" and the "*Mrs. Stormaway's*, whose conduct is class and out of it, in painful contrast. This reason is precisely similar to that which many offer for not securing religion and joining the church of Christ. But as such a reason, if strictly true, and allowed the weight desired, would have operated with equal effect in the days of Christ and his Apostles,—for a Peter denied Christ, a Judas sold him, and all forsook him and fled—yes, and in the days of pentecostal power, dissensions arose about the distributions to the poor, while Ananias and his wife lied to the Holy Ghost;—so we must dismiss it as proving *too much*, and therefore *proving nothing*.

But from the way this libeller of Methodism puts the objection, we cannot but infer that class-meetings should be given up at once, and for ever. Hear him;—"A person of notoriously violent temper, or of doubtful veracity, or of questionable integrity in his dealings with his fellow creatures, or of habitual insobriety"—"stands up and speaks of his spiritual condition as altogether encouraging; he throws in probably a few common-place remarks about temptations and trials, and concludes by thanking God for good desires, or with the stereotyped statement that he enjoys peace,—*this is the nomenclature of the class-room*, and without intending to detract from the genuine emotional piety of the truly sincere persons who use it, I affirm that *in a lamentably large number of cases it is mere vague formalism*." Could any person read the above, and in connection with what he says in another place, viz:—"I have no wish to abolish class-meetings, on the contrary, it would grieve me much if they were discontinued," without concluding that the gentleman's *understanding* is as eccentric in its workings as the "*nervous organizations*" already referred to? The fact is, disguise it as he may, that with a special intention of insulting and vilifying your humble servant, he has no hesitation when he deems it necessary for an object, to malign and insult both the ministers and people of our whole church. But his spiteful efforts will pass for their real value.

The third reason, would you have imagined it, is but a *rehash* of his first one! "*Persons so constituted are averse to speak before others of their spiritual exercises*." "*Nervous organizations*," doubtless. Then they look at class-meetings "as a sort of confessional, and you cannot disabuse them." "*Booh!*"—send them to the Sabbath School—that's the place for them. "Objections like these," he tells us, "and many others that might be enumerated:" Hold! here is "jargon" and "nonsense" quantum suff. He has given his best, and yet what are they? Yes,—what are they coming as they do from so great an authority?

By a kind of after thought, he says he "does not at all pretend to be a scholar." But I apprehend you will readily agree with me in believing, that no contrast in the conduct and profession of his class-meeting worthies is more glaring than this his profession and the pretentious language of his letter. His whole conduct goes far to confirm the poet's dictum:—

"A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep or taste not the pierian spring;
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again."

Yours truly,

JOHN BORLAND.

Tonoxo, 20th February, 1856.